

Commercial and Industrial Buildings,
Ede's Robe Tanning Company Factory
41 Main Street
Dubuque
Dubuque County
Iowa

HABS No. IA-160-BN

HABS
IOWA,
31-DUBU,
13-BN-

**PHOTOGRAPHS
HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA**

Historic American Buildings Survey
Department of the Interior
National Park Service
Rocky Mountain Regional Office
P.O. Box 25287
Denver Colorado 80225

Ede's Robe Tanning Company Factory

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Site Location:

41 Main Street
Dubuque, Dubuque County, Iowa
DOT designation: Resource Site No. 5.9
Cadastral grid : SE1/4 NE1/4 S25 T89N R2E
USGS quadrangle: Dubuque South Iowa 7.5'
UTM coordinates: 15.691990.4707010
Lot dimensions : 54.9'x 140' : .18 acre
Lot description: Lots 1 and 2 of City Lot 540

Present Owner:

Iowa Department of Transportation

Present Usage:

wholesale supplier

Present Condition : good

Overall Dimensions: 81'x 91'; 2 stories

Orientation :

east

Architectural

Plan type : 2-story trapezoid with corner entrance.

Description :

Foundation: coursed ashlar limestone perimeter walls

Structure : wood frame with brick masonry bearing walls.

Ext. walls: common red brick laid in running bond.

Roof : flat composition roof with brick parapet walls.

Chimneys : all original integral exterior chimneys removed.

Openings : painted wood 12/12 double-hung windows on both floors, 1st floor windows with brick segmental arch heads, 2nd with flat arch heads, both floors with stone lug sills; 8-light fixed-sash basement windows at sidewalk level; single-leaf front door with wood fluted pilaster surrounds located in truncated corner of building.

Details : corbeled brick and stone block courses on parapets; concentric stone steps leading to corner front entrance.

Construction Date : 1905-06

Architecture Style: 19th Century Functional

Physical History : In May 1905 David Ede purchased this property on the corner of Shields and Jones streets for \$3,000 from the heirs of early Dubuque capitalist John D. Bush. Soon thereafter he began construction of this substantial brick block to house his growing hide tanning business. The building was completed in June 1906 at a cost of about \$17,000. Located on the former site of the Bush Brothers' planing mill, the two-story structure was slightly wedge-shaped to conform with the acute angle of the street intersection. Ede's business thrived, and in 1909 a large, two-story side addition was built for \$15,000 that almost doubled the building's square footage. The building was

organized with the business office, main tanning room and finishing room on the first floor of the original section and the dye department in the side wing. Drying, cutting and sewing rooms occupied the second floor of the main building, with the stock room upstairs in the addition. Ede operated in this building for over thirty years. Around 1938 the company was renamed the Ede's King-O-Fur Tanning Company, and within two years the building was occupied by the Julian Moes Wholesale Beverage Company. This was soon followed by the Dubuque Wholesale Grocery Company, which was in turn followed by the Sloan Wholesale Grocery Distributing Company. In 1969 this building was occupied by Linehan and Molo, plumbing contractors who since 1900 have dealt in coal, cement, salt, steam and gas fittings and electrical supplies. Throughout this time the structure has undergone relatively minor exterior alterations, most notable of which are the demolition of the rear part of the original building and the side addition, infill of two doorways with brick and infill of several sidewalk-level basement windows with stone.

Significance: David F. Ede was born in Ontario in 1846. He later moved to Winnipeg, Manitoba, and made a fortune buying and selling real estate during a land boom, only to lose it investing in grain elevators along the route of the newly completed Canadian Pacific Railroad. Ede then embarked in real estate in Sioux City, Iowa, and recouped his earlier success. He brought these earnings to Dubuque in 1895 and opened the Ede's Robe Tanning Company that year. In April 1896 Ede incorporated the company with William Hockaday and Clifton Trewin with a capitalization of \$15,000.

Ede located his factory propitiously at the corner of Shields and Jones streets near the William Ryan and Son Packing Company (a ready supplier of hides) and the Illinois Central depot (a ready shipping point). His business included tanning hides - primarily horse and cow - and manufacturing fur robes, garments and rugs. "Ede furs are scientifically cut and there is no expense saved that would make them equal to the best furs produced anywhere in the world," a 1911 business gazette stated. "Their stock of furs includes nearly every native and foreign skin in their various grades, thus making it possible to handle a large quantity of repair work with entire satisfaction. Visitors are made welcome to the plant, as the firm takes just pride in showing customers a complete and up-to-date institution, and want them to see how clean and free from things offensive a tannery can be and under what favorable conditions the employees work." In addition to fur tanning and clothing manufacturing, Ede employed taxidermists to mount game trophies. Staffed by some 40 to 60 people, the company grew into one of the largest of its type in the country and eventually established branch plants in St. Paul, Omaha and Sioux Falls. The home office remained in Dubuque, where Ede maintained a high civic profile.

Robe tanning was a major industry for Dubuque, and firms such as Ede's and the Dubuque Tanning and Robe Company contributed to make the city a nationally

important tanning center. This building is thus historically significant as the site of one of the city's major early 20th century industries. Its architecture typifies factory design of the period and, although altered somewhat, the factory retains a high degree of integrity.

References:

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Sanborn Insurance Maps: 1879, 1884, 1891, 1909, 1972.
Iowa State Gazetteer and Business Directory: 1882-1921.
Dubuque County Assessment Record: 3-17-6-10.
Land Title Abstract (located at Iowa Department of Transportation, Ames, Iowa).
Iowa Department of Transportation, "Draft Environmental Impact Statement - Cultural Resources Assessment."
H.W. Gardner, *Greater Dubuque* (Dubuque: The Times Journal, 1911), page 54.
Franklin T. Oldt and P.J. Quigley, *History of Dubuque County, Iowa* (Chicago: Goodspeed Historical Association, 1911); page 678.
Descriptive Survey of Dubuque (Dubuque: Dubuque Chamber of Commerce, 1911).
Dubuque Telegraph-Herald: 30 December 1906; 2 January 1910; 23 March 1913.

Compiler:

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